DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 130 JC 900 061

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TITLE Outreach and Information: Survey Results. Research Report Number 58.
INSTITUTION Howard Community Coll., Columbia, Md.
PUB DATE May 89
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Choice; Community Colleges; *Enrollment Influences; *Information Sources; Majors (Students); School Surveys; *Student Attitudes; *Student Characteristics; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS *Howard Community College MD

ABSTRACT

In 1989, a study was conducted at Howard Community College (HCC) to investigate influences on students' decision to attend HCC and the sources of information about HCC that influenced their choice. In-class surveys were administered by selected faculty members. The resulting 925 responses represented 24% of the 3,926 students enrolled in fall 1988; however, males, full-time students, and students under 21 years of age were over-represented in the study sample in comparison to their representation in the student body as a whole. Study findings included the following: (1) 23% of the respondents possessed a postsecondary educational credential, and 67% had taken college credit courses within the last two years; (2) 31% of the respondents listed location as the single most important factor in their decision to attend HCC, while 14% listed tuition costs, 11% cited the availability of a specific educational program, and 10% gave HCC's placement record for transfer students as the most important factor; (3) (5) the factors most often considered "not important" included changes in students' plans to attend other colleges, availability of financial aid, job placement record, and extracurricular programs; and (6) information sources cited as the "most important" influence on college choice included the mailed schedule of classes (30%), family or friends (18%), HCC staff (9%), teacher/counselor (7%), and reputation of HCC (7%). Survey data is attached. (JMC)

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OUTREACH AND INFORMATION: SURVEY RESULTS

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Research Report Number 58, May 1989.

JC 900 061

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HOWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND PERSONNEL
RESEARCH REPORT NUMBER 58 MAY 1989

OUTREACH AND INFORMATION: SURVEY RESULTS

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HOW AND WHY WAS THE SURVEY CONDUCTED?

What makes people decide to attend Howard Community College? What sources of information about HCC influence decisions to attend? In an attempt to answer those two important questions, HCC surveyed students enrolled in credit courses in the fall 1988 semester. Selected faculty members were asked to distribute the surveys to their classes. The resultant 925 responses represent 24% of the 3,926 enrollees in the fall of 1988.

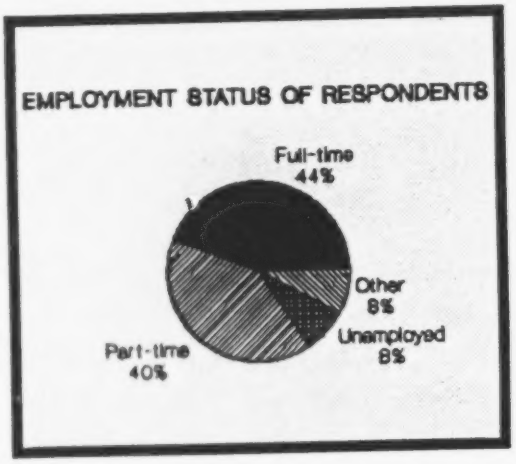
WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY?

The students who responded to the survey were different in some respects from the student body as a whole. Because of these differences, the results of this survey cannot be considered as representative of the entire student body. Improved sampling techniques on future surveys of this type will allow the results to be generalized to all students.

	SURVEY RESPONDENTS	ALL ENROLLEES
20 OR UNDER	37%	26%
FEMALE	52%	61%
FULL-TIME	38%	22%
DAY STUDENTS	54%	53%

There were, for example, more students who were 20 years old or under (37% of survey respondents, versus 26% for all students). There were also considerably more male survey respondents than there were males in the student body (48% and 39%, respectively). Full-time students had a higher representation among survey respondents - 38% versus the 22% of the student population in fall 1988. (Detailed characteristics of survey respondents are displayed in Table One.)

Other information collected on survey respondents is not routinely available for all enrollees. It was discovered, for example, that 84% of the respondents were employed - 44% of them full-time.



Ten percent of the respondents had a certificate or AA degree, and 13% had a Bachelor's degree or higher, for a surprising total of 23% with some post-secondary educational credential.

The survey asked if respondents had taken college credit courses within the last two years. Sixty-seven percent said they had, and 74% of those had taken those credits at HCC. The only other institutions for which more than ten respondents saying they had earned credits there within the last two years were: UMBC, UMCP, and Catonsville Community College. The seventy-four other institutions listed by respondents spanned the country, with Hawaii, California, Nebraska, and Connecticut represented as well as many points in between. Some HCC students bring with them a truly international perspective on learning, having taken courses in England, Germany, or Australia in the past two years.

Survey respondents represented a broad spectrum of HCC major programs of study. As was true of all fall enrollees, Business Administration accounted for the highest proportion of majors. There were proportionately fewer survey respondents with undeclared majors. Information on the majors of survey respondents is shown on Table Two.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS: WHAT INFLUENCED THEM?

Howard Community College's location was a very important factor in the decision to attend for 74% of the survey respondents. More respondents, in fact, cited location as a "very important" factor than any of the other factors listed on the survey. Other factors cited as very important in deciding to attend HCC by at least half of the respondents were:

- o Educational programs (63%)
- o HCC's tuition costs (55%)
- o The variety of courses (51%)

Other factors listed as being very important by one-fourth or more of the respondents were:

- o Record of transfers to four year colleges (47%)
- o Quality of faculty (44%)
- o Size of classes (40%)
- o Open admissions policy (37%)
- o Adult-oriented courses and services (35%)
- o Plans to attend another college changed (28%)

It may be instructive to examine those factors with high ratings of "Not important" on decision factors. Those factors with the highest ratings of "not important" were:

- o Preparatory/Developmental courses (39%)
- o Plans to attend another college changed (47%)
- o Availability of financial aid (57%)
- o Job placement record (59%)
- o Extracurricular programs (64%)

Complete information on ratings of decision factors is displayed in Table Three.

Survey respondents were asked to identify the one most important factor in making their decision to attend HCC. Location was identified as the "Most Important" factor by more respondents than any other factor, with 31% singling it out.

HCC's tuition costs continue to be an attraction, and that was the second most popular reason given for attending (14%). Since HCC's tuition costs are not lower than surrounding community colleges, it is assumed that respondents were comparing it to four year institutions.

THE FIVE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN DECIDING TO ATTEND HCC WERE:

- O LOCATION
- O TUITION COSTS
- O EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS
- O FOUR YEAR TRANSFER RECORD
- O QUALITY OF FACULTY

The specific educational programs offered at HCC were the most important factor for 11% of the respondents in making their decision to attend. For another 10%, HCC's perceived placementrecord for transfers to four year colleges was the most powerful motivating factor. The quality of the faculty was the single most important reason given for attending HCC by 6% of the respondents. The only other factor having 5% or more of the respondents citing it as the most important was "plans to attend another college changed." Table Four presents the ranking of the decision factors by survey respondents.

HOW DID STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT HCC?

Mailed information was the most important source of information influencing decisions to attend HCC. Thirty-eight percent of the survey respondents said that the schedule of classes mailed to their home was very important in making the decision to attend HCC. Another 26% said that other information about HCC mailed to their home was very important.

SCHEDULES AND PUBLICATIONS MAILED TO HOMES WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT HCC

People were also important sources of information -- 20% of the respondents said that family members or friends were very important sources of information about HCC. Contact with HCC staff was very important for 18%, and 17% of the respondents credited their guidance counselors or teachers with being very important sources of information. The word-of-mouth reputation for HCC was very important for 16% of the respondents. Sixteen percent said that the admissions interview was a very important source of information about HCC. Table Five gives more detail about the importance of various information sources. There may be real differences in choices by gender and age. These will be explored in future surveys.

The survey asked the respondents about the importance of advertisements and articles in eight different newspapers. Only The Columbia Flier and The Howard County Times were cited as important by 5% or more of the respondents. Three-fourths or more of respondents said that each of the newspapers listed was not at all important as a source of information about HCC.

When asked to identify out the one most important source of information about HCC, the importance of the schedule of classes mailed to repondents' homes was overwhelmingly affirmed: 30% cited that as the one most important factor in their decision to attend HCC. The five next highest in the ranking of the importance of information sources were:

- o Family/friends 18%
- o HCC staff 8%
- o Teacher/counselor 7%
- o Reputation of HCC 7%
- o Place of employment 6%

Table Six gives the complete listing of the rankings of the sources of information. It is important to remember that all of these responses pertain to currently enrolled sudents only, for whom mailed schedules would be expected to be important. Non-enrolled county residents might evaluate these sources of information quite differently.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As an initial attempt to delineate the factors which most influence students' decisions to attend HCC, this survey elicited some important information. Future surveys of this type will build upon its findings, and will be designed to ensure a more representative sample of students.

The importance of HCC's location as a decision factor was affirmed by the survey results. Several other factors emerged as being of prime importance to a considerable number of students: tuition costs, educational programs, HCC's placement record for transfers to four year colleges, and the quality of the faculty. Policy decisions affecting any of these factors should be made with full awareness of their importance to students in making their decisions to attend HCC.

Mailed publications about HCC stood out in their importance as a source of information influencing decisions to attend HCC. If future surveys reinforce this finding, the content, appearance, and the frequency of mailings should be carefully evaluated in light of the importance placed upon them by students.

The importance for HCC of continuing to foster good will in the community cannot be underestimated. For many students, the most important source of information about HCC was other people. A positive image and reputation for HCC will continue to be one of the most successful recruitment tools. Strategies for expanding the role staff and students may play as community liaisons may be well worth exploring.

TABLE ONE. CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS TO HCC'S FALL 1988 OUTREACH AND INFORMATION SURVEY

CHARACTERISTIC	RESPONDENTS N(925)	%	ENROLLEES N(3926)	%
o AGE:				
20 or under	332	37%	1036	26%
21 - 30	354	39%	1438	37%
31 - 40	126	14%	754	19%
41 - 50	77	9%	431	11%
51 or over	15	2%	259	7%
o GENDER:				
Male	431	48%	1520	39%
Female	464	52%	2406	61%
o STUDENT STATUS:				
Full-time (12+ credits)	345	38%	854	22%
Part-time	551	62%	3072	78%
o ATTENDANCE:				
Day	488	54%	2086	53%
Evening/Weekend	418	46%	1840	47%
o EMPLOYMENT STATUS:				
Employed Full-time	399	44%		
Employed Part-time	362	40%		
Homemaker/Unpaid Work	41	5%		
Military/Self-employed	26	3%		
Unemployed	75	8%		
o CURRENT EDUCATIONAL LEVEL:				
Less than 12th grade	5	1%		
High school/GED	679	76%		
Certificate/AA degree	87	10%		
Bachelor's degree or higher	110	13%		
o COLLEGE CREDIT COURSES WITHIN THE LAST TWO YEARS:				
Yes	609	67%		
No	294	33%		
o Where:				
Howard Community College	457	74%		
UMBC	16	3%		
UMCP	15	2%		
Catonsville Community College	12	2%		
Montgomery College	9	2%		
Anne Arundel Community College	8	1%		
UMUC	6	1%		
All Others	97	16%		

TABLE TWO. MAJORS OF OUTREACH AND INFORMATION SURVEY RESPONDENTS

MAJOR	NUMBER	PERCENT
Business Administration	158	18.6%
Undeclared Major	115	13.5
Business Management	88	10.4
Accounting	79	9.3
Computer Science	49	5.8
Engineering	48	5.7
General Studies	34	4.0
Teacher Education	30	3.5
Liberal Arts	29	3.4
Electronics Technology	27	3.2
Psychology	19	2.2
Data Processing	18	2.1
Pre-Medicine	14	1.6
Secretarial Science	11	1.3
Health Professions	10	1.2
Social Sciences	10	1.2
Art	9	1.1
Biomedical Engineering Technology	9	1.1
Construction Technology	8	0.9
Pre-Pharmacy	8	0.9
Computer Technology	7	0.8
Pre-Allied Health	7	0.8
Life Sciences	6	0.7
Computer Aided Design Technology	5	0.6
CPA Preparation Certificate	5	0.6
Microcomputer Applications	5	0.6
Retail Management	5	0.6
Theatre	5	0.6
Financial Planning	4	0.5
Laboratory Science	4	0.5
Music	4	0.5
Office Automation Management	4	0.5
Physical Sciences	3	0.4
Pre-Optometry	3	0.4
Pre-Veterinary Medicine	3	0.4
Pre-Dentistry	2	0.2
Pre-Medical Technology	2	0.2

TABLE THREE. RESPONDENTS' RATINGS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SELECTED FATORS IN THE DECISION TO ATTEND HCC

	FACTOR	VERY IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT
1	Location	74%	21%	5%
2	Educational programs	63%	30%	7%
3	Tuition costs	55%	31%	14%
4	Variety of courses offered	51%	38%	11%
5	HCC's placement record for transfers to four year colleges	47%	27%	26%
6	Quality of faculty	44%	41%	14%
7	Size of the classes	40%	39%	21%
8	Open admissions policy	37%	37%	26%
9	Courses/services for adults	35%	35%	30%
10	Plans to attend another college changed	28%	25%	47%
11	General reputation of HCC	24%	54%	22%
12	Preparatory/developmental courses	22%	39%	39%
13	Availability of financial aid	22%	21%	57%
14	HCC's job placement record	12%	29%	59%
15	Extracurricular programs	7%	29%	64%

TABLE FOUR. RESPONDENTS' RATINGS OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR (IN RANK ORDER) IN DECISION TO ATTEND HCC

RANKING OF IMPORTANCE	FACTOR	PERCENT CHOOSING AS MOST IMPORTANT
1	Location	30.7%
2	Tuition costs	13.7
3	Educational programs	11.0
4	HCC's placement record for transfers to four year colleges	9.8
5	Quality of faculty	5.6
6	Plans to attend another college changed	4.6
7	General reputation of HCC	4.4
8	Variety of courses offered	4.2
9	Size of the classes	3.8
10	Courses/services for adults	2.9
11	Open admissions policy	2.2
12	Preparatory/developmental courses	1.5
13	Availability of financial aid	1.4
14	HCC's job placement record	0.6
15	Extracurricular programs	0.1
16	Other	3.5

TABLE FIVE. RESPONDENTS' RATINGS OF IMPORTANCE OF SOURCES OF INFORMATION IN DECISION TO ATTEND HCC

	FACTOR	VERY IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT
1	Schedule of classes mailed to home	38%	34%	28%
2	Other HCC information mailed to home	26%	34%	40%
3	Family members/friends	20%	37%	44%
4	Contact with HCC staff	18%	25%	57%
5	Teacher or guidance counselor	17%	30%	53%
6	Word-of-mouth reputation of HCC	16%	45%	39%
7	Admissions interview	16%	23%	61%
8	Information display	15%	31%	54%
9	Place of employment	13%	25%	61%
10	Response to telephone inquiry	12%	22%	66%
11	Ads in the Columbia Flier	12%	13%	75%
12	Articles in the Columbia Flier	11%	13%	77%
13	Ads in the Howard County Times	9%	15%	76%
14	Articles in the Howard C. Times	8%	12%	80%
15	College/Career fair	6%	17%	77%
16	Presentation at high school	5%	17%	78%
17	Newspaper Advertisements	*	*	*
18	Newspaper Articles	*	*	*

* Newspaper advertisements and articles were rated separately by specific newspapers. Only the Columbia Flier (12%) and The Howard County Times (9%) had over 5% citing their advertisements as "very important" sources of information. These same two papers were the only ones having over 5% (11% and 8%, respectively) rating their articles as "very important" sources of information about HCC. All newspapers' advertisements and articles were rated as "not at all important" sources of information by three-fourths or more of the respondents.

TABLE SIX. RESPONDENTS' RATINGS OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCE OF INFORMATION (IN RANK ORDER) IN DECISION TO ATTEND HCC

RANKING OF IMPORTANCE	FACTOR	PERCENT CHOOSING AS MOST IMPORTANT
1	Schedule of classes mailed to home	30.1%
2	Family members/friends	18.2
3	Contact with HCC staff	7.6
4	Teacher or guidance counselor	7.1
5	Word-of-mouth reputation of HCC	6.8
6	Place of employment	6.4
7	Information display	5.0
8	Other HCC information mailed to home	4.5
9	Newspaper Advertisements	2.5
10	Newspaper Articles	2.5
11	Admissions interview	2.2
12	Presentation at high school	1.4
13	Response to telephone inquiry	1.1
14	College/Career fair	0.5
15	Other	4.1

OUTREACH AND INFORMATION: SURVEY RESULTS

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A SPECIAL DEBT OF APPRECIATION IS OWED TO ALL FACULTY MEMBE
ALLOWED CLASS TIME FOR THE COMPLETION OF THIS SURVEY. APPR
AND THANKS IS ALSO GIVEN TO ALL STUDENTS WHO FILLED OUT THE
FORMS.

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